

3
R /516 cont./

121 by the effect of medical care, we shall take 1 January 1950 as the
165 date of reference for the calculations of mortality among the Boni.

/517/

II. - Demography of the Boni

Census. - Estimation of Age.

8
• 125 Method used. The demographic study of the Boni presents the
difficulties inherent in all populations without civil records:

1. Difficulty of determining the ages of individuals;
2. Difficulty of determining for each woman the deceased
children in relation to the surviving ones.

8
125 We attempted to establish a local chronology by linking the
173 ages of individuals to events of known date that had stuck in their
minds.

More particularly we fixed the ages of the old men from the
voyage of the explorer Crevaux (1877) and from the death of the
grand man Anato (1891), the ages of middle-aged persons from
events which occurred between 1915 and 1924, death of the
grand man Ochi (1915), end of World War I (1918), hydroplane
accident at the mouth of the Inini (1921), installation of a rose-
wood factory (1925).

8
125 The persons born after 1930 were placed without difficulty,
for we knew a certain number of them as children or adolescents
in 1948.

8
[829] Starting with a certain number of men whose age could be
fixed with considerable accuracy, all the others, men and women,
were placed by comparison. In fact, if the Boni do not know their
age, they are able to say that they are, for example, two or three
years younger than so-and-so (6).

8
[755]

6. Their attention is brought to bear on these
age differences because, if a group isolated in
the bush is led to address a prayer to the ancestors
for the curing of a sick person, this prayer has to
be pronounced by the oldest person.

/517 cont./

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We believe the ages are determined with a probable error of less than two years for persons less than 30 years old, two to three years for persons between 30 and 60 years old, and three years above 60. But this error has no systematic character, and one may assume that it is eliminated on the average, disturbing the calculations of fertility and of mortality very little.

[161] Census, age pyramids. The census finished on 1 January 1958 included 811 persons, of whom 666 were from villages on the French bank and 145 on the Surinam bank (Kotika). With regard to the latter, we interrogated them individually when they came over to the French side, particularly when they came to attend the celebrations of the end of mourning at Boniville in November 1957. Temporary absentees (less than 5%) were placed by information provided by their nearest relatives. /-18/ /Diagram 1 appears here./

We estimate the omissions in the census at less than 2%. These omissions are almost exclusively a matter of adolescents and young orphans or youngsters raised by persons other than their own parents.

[167] Emigration and immigration are very slight, practically zero as far as the women are concerned. Thus the age pyramid really represents the demographic situation of the Boni and lends itself to complementary calculations of mortality.

Interrogation of the women. The women of the villages on the French bank were questioned about the children they had had and lost. An effort was made to place the dead children in relation to the survivors and in relation to the local chronology. The age of the dead ones was determined by comparison with children or adolescents living at the time of the inquiry.

For the dead adults an attempt was made to fix the year of their death in relation to the local chronology.

/518 cont. /

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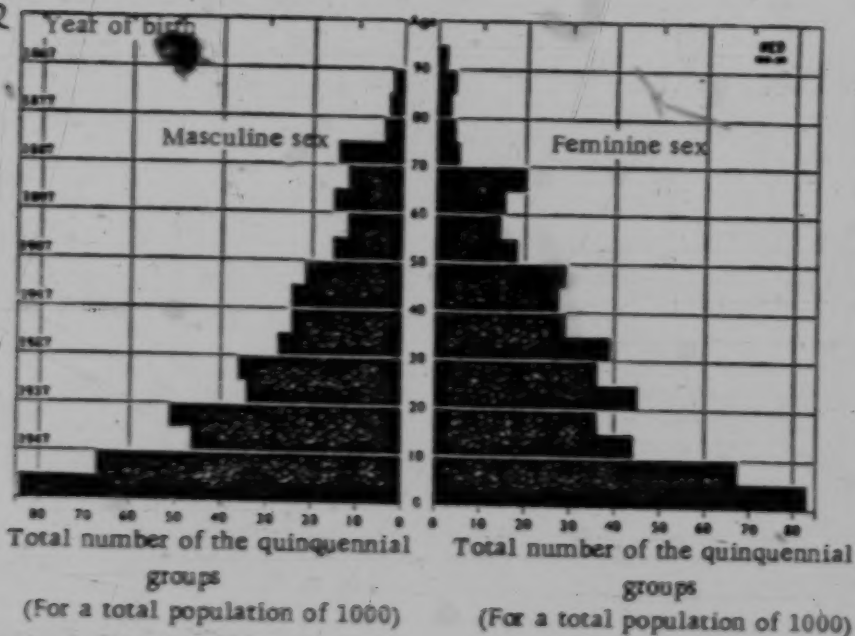


Diagram No. 1. Boni Refugee Blacks of the Upper Maroni
Age Pyramid on 1 January 1958

- 125 We gave up the idea of deducing the number of stillborn infants from the mortality tables, in order to facilitate comparison with the Indian populations where this distinction would not have been possible. We took account of all the children born at term.

For greater certainty we questioned the women twice at an interval of one year (end of 1956 and end of 1957). Those who gave contradictory answers were eliminated. /519/

[162] On 1 January 1958 the women from the villages on the French side born up until 1939 inclusive and married for at least one year were 216 in number, including in that number 17 women from the village of Kotika residing temporarily on the French side; 198 were questioned.

/519 cont. /

- 125 --158 (80%) answered with good grace,
--33 (17%) answered with reticence or gave contradictory
[593] answers in 1956 and 1957. Checking showed that they neglected
to mention a living child, generally one of their older ones
whom they were not raising themselves. In spite of the pre-
cautions taken, there are some omissions in the census of the
adolescents and young people because of this (7).

7. On the other hand, we never ascer-
tained any dissimulation concerning
dead children. On the contrary, the
Boni women speak of their deceased chil-
dren with a certain indifference.

For 28 of these women we were able to reconstruct their
lives with sufficient precision by interrogating contradictorily
the husbands and the older brothers of the same mother. The
five others were eliminated;

7 (3%) obstinately refused to answer without giving any
justification for their attitude.

[484] Eighteen women could not be added, this being due to the
continual moving of the Boni between their villages, their crop
plantings, and their fishing places.

We took into account 7 women who died before 1957, whom
we had been able to question in the preceding years.

[163] All in all, we have preserved 193 records of women having
had 747 children, of whom 472 had survived as of the first of
January 1958.

/37 cont. /

44 An example of scission in a kin group: the separation of Dipelu II
571 between Kormotibo and Asisi. (See Dip. II genealogical table.)

578 This scission resulted from a ridiculous incident: a falling-out which occurred between O Alawenchi † (E19) and O Bongo (E6) because of a hoe which the first claimed to have been stolen from her by Bongo.

Since neither one would yield, they became really angry and fought. /38/

Δ Agosa, head of the lineage, taking the part of Alawenchi, decided to secede and settle in Asisi.

O Pili † (F35) and O Sésey † (F38) who, their mother being dead, had been raised by Alawenchi, joined them and founded families in Asisi.

(621)
(1784) This explains the present scission of this group and the bizarre division of its members between Kormotibo and Asisi. This scission had no result on the religious plane, unity being maintained by the pitiless tie of the kunu. Nowadays, Captain Poopu's authority is exerted normally on the fraction in Asisi. Relations between the two groups are rather good. /Figs. 5 and 6 appear here. /

/39/

CHAPTER III

● 125

INVENTORY OF THE PEOPLING OF THE BONI VILLAGES

We have tried to take a complete census of the Boni of the Upper Maroni as of January 1, 1958, including for the women the statement of their successive unions and of their children living and dead. This census is associated with detailed plans of the villages and a study of the territorial implantation of kin groups.

(126)

/39 cont. /

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It seemed to us that in the present state of knowledge about the Refugee Blacks a study of limited scope but covering the totality of the population was preferable to the very intensive study of a small group; only the study of the population considered in its entirety brings out clearly its family custom, its tendencies in the matter of marriage, divorce, inheritance; it alone can lead to a precise knowledge of its demographic data so important even on the social plane.

Finally, this detailed inventory constitutes a firm base for following the evolution of the population in the future.

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Taking a census of the Boni posed a problem much more difficult than for most populations without vital statistics. The tribes of the Refugee Blacks enjoy in effect a statute of autonomous nations under protectorate and insist fiercely on this autonomy. The French administration has never been able to take a census of them any more than the administration of Surinam has for the Djuka and Saramaka, colliding with an ingenious ill will which defies all efforts.

It is not that they fear taxes (this is a notion practically unknown in Guiana, even on the coast (1), and the French

1. Practically, in the interior of the country, with the exception of traders who are subject to a license, nobody pays taxes and there are not even any lists of taxable people. The Creoles of the interior (principally from the British West Indies) are known only because of the fact that, as foreign subjects, they must make declarations of change of residence; French citizens are scarcely known at the administrative

/39 cont. /

648

posts except as they present themselves for recording of vital statistics or for registration on voting lists.

administration has for a long time appeared /40/ in the eyes of the inhabitants of the interior as a benevolent office); but they obey the old African maxim of never telling the whites more than half of what they know.

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In the absence of any nominal census which could serve as a point of departure, this job presented considerable difficulties arising principally from the extreme mobility of the population:

[484]

—Never is the whole population of a village assembled together simultaneously; the proportion of those absent frequently reaches 50 per cent, especially in the fine season (hunting, fishing, boating, clearings at the farming habitations, etc.);

[551]

—A good many men and women have two, sometimes three, names used interchangeably. If one does not personally know a large part of the inhabitants of the villages and does not have at his disposal carefully made-up genealogical tables, it is impossible to understand anything;

[115]

—If the men respond in good faith, it is not the same with the women, who are inaccessible to any reasoning. Some try to cash in on the information they give, others obstinately refuse to answer;

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591

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—A number of adolescents and even of men between 20 and 35 years old have no regular hut. Each Boni, man or woman, is in principle expected to build a hut in one of the "great villages." But this residence may be fictitious: It can, for example, be a tumbled-down hut which they intend to put up again some day... or the pent roof of the house of the mother or a brother, under which they install themselves on days when a ceremony causes the lineage to meet together, residing the rest of the year in a farming habitation.

/40 cont. /

- 125 In spite of the relations of trust developed between the Boni
[123] and ourselves in the course of the work carried out together during four long missions, we were able to take this census only progressively and indirectly, by using simultaneously the following procedures:

[166]
[136] —Study of the genealogy of the groups, going up from woman to woman up to the founding ancestress, then going back down from her. These genealogical tables, some of which extend over nine generations and include more than 160 persons, brought to light a certain number of temporarily absent people and individuals who lived away from the villages, isolated in the middle of the Creole gold miners, but continuing to make up part of their group; they also brought to light a certain number of young people and orphan children taken in by distant relatives who would not have spoken about them directly. But on this point, gaps remain;

[126] —Detailed plan of the villages and interrogation of the village heads as to the persons living in each house;

—Interrogation of the women about their dead and surviving children;

—General verification with the help of perfectly trustworthy informants who possessed a thorough knowledge of the genealogy of the groups.

[162] The census, stopped on January 1, 1958, covered 811 persons of whom 667 /41/ were from the villages of the French bank and 144 from the Surinam bank (Kotika). As for the latter, we
[165] questioned them individually when they came to the French bank, especially when they came to attend the end of mourning festivities in Boniville in October, 1957. The Kotika census is less

[128]
[126] exact than that of the French villages, and in addition we were not able to make a plan of the village. For this reason we have not reproduced it in the present work, where only the corresponding genealogical table appears.

/41 cont./

621 The principle behind the constitution of the Boni villages
613 is, as we have said, the localization of the matrilineage. Men
[591] and women live in the village of their maternal kin; the wife
does not leave her village to join her husband, who comes to visit
her from time to time without ceasing, himself, to live in the
midst of his own lineage.

The composition of each village thus corresponds, at least
in principle, to the group of living people on the genealogical
table. But a certain number of exceptions are observed:

[167] -A certain number of men (about 20 out of 800 persons)
have emigrated for good and can no longer be counted in the
population of the villages;

[619] -On the other hand, a dozen Djuka and Saramaka married
[591] to Boni women have settled permanently in the villages and have
been included in the census.

● 125 We have tried to estimate with as much precision as possible
128 the age of the people concerned, by means of events of known
[173] date which they remember, from the trip of the explorer Crevaux
(1878) to the war 1939-45. We have established a local chronology,
reproduced as an appendix at the end of the present chapter.

125 The demographic survey, which has been the subject of
another publication (1), was conducted parallel with the sociological

[113] 1. "Etude démographique comparée des
Noirs Réfugiés Boni et des Indiens Oayana
du Haut-Maroni /Comparative Demographic
Study of the Boni Refugee Blacks and the
Oayana Indians of the Upper Maroni/, " in
Population, Éditions de l'INED, 1959, No. 3. ²_A

Investigation.

²_A [See S. Hurault, This file-- Analyst.]

/41 cont. /

125 We estimate the gaps in the census at less than 3 per cent.
[128] These gaps involve essentially the adolescents and young people orphaned or raised by others than their parents.

[648] The adults over 35 years old were practically all known individually to us. Children under 10 years could be counted very exactly thanks to the distribution of milk carried out since 1956 by the Maripasoula medical center.

125 Classification. The classification of the population was made by
128 village of residence.
162

For each woman we have indicated her successive unions and the children who issued from them. The sign † means deceased, the sign ≠ divorce, the sign †† means that the husband is deceased but after the break-up of the union.

The listings for women preceded by an asterisk * indicate that they can be regarded as complete from the demographic point of view (children living and deceased).

A double asterisk ** indicates that the listing can in addition be regarded as complete with regard to successive marriages and divorces (2).

2. We avoided asking directly

these questions to which the women replied unwillingly.

The information was obtained indirectly by questioning brothers and husbands. It could be obtained complete for only about 30 per cent of the women.

/42/

125 The name of each individual is printed in boldface type
128 once where he can be considered as habitually residing.
162

Children under 15 are considered as living with the persons responsible for their education. If it was not possible to obtain accurate information about this, they are considered as living with their mother.

Each listing bears a number, for example Dju D7, making it possible to find again the individual's place in the genealogical table. In the example noted, refer to the table of the Dju lineage, line D, no. 7.

601 Genealogical tables. These are of unequal value according to the
128 age and the memory of the old people consulted. In general
[115] they go back to three generations beyond the oldest of the old men now alive.

[165] Since the Boni show remarkable longevity, and the average difference in age between two generations can be estimated at 31 years, one can assume as probable that the most distant ancestress known of each lineage was born between the middle and the end of the 18th century. For example, if we assume that
[613] Kuluba, the ancestress of the Awara Bakka, was about 100 years old in 1956, we can take for granted that she was born about 1856 and that her great-grandmother was born about 1760.

613 The most ancient ancestress known of each lineage is certainly not the foundress. It is infinitely probable that the founding of these groups goes back to the beginning of the 18th century and that they were born on the same plantations where the ancestors of the Refugee Blacks were slaves; this would explain the names borne by the lineages, names which nearly always allude to a plantation or to a slave-owner.

601 In a general way, the memory of the Boni is very sure,
128 and the information given in the form: Ma X... begot So-and-so,

/60/

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[134]
[241] There are no gardens around the cabins because the conditions of the soil and climate render permanent cultivation impracticable. The nearest thing is a few persons planting some banana trees around the hut at the foot of which they spread the hearth ashes. As a general rule villages are closely hemmed in by secondary brushwood, and people plant far from one another and sometimes very far from the village.

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824 If it does not admit the appropriation of land to individuals, custom does admit, on the other hand, the ownership of trees. In the villages the useful trees (coconut trees, maripa palms /attalea excelsa/, mango trees, cashew-apple trees, etc.) all have owners. The tree is considered as personal property and is transmitted by inheritance in the same way as a gun or a canoe. [428] The procedure employed by the Boni for the dispersion of the inheritance among the members of the lineage of the dead man sometimes has the effect of transmitting the ownership of a tree to a person who is not of the village. For example, in Boniville, 428
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613 [222] where a fraction of the Kotika lineage lives, two caumou palms were bequeathed a long time ago to members of the lineage living in Kotika, who come each year to gather the fruit.

Appendix

Local Chronology Used for Determining Ages

- 173
[125] 1876 Death of Grand Man-Atyaba.
1877 Trip of the explorer Crevaux from the Maroni to the Yari and the Amazon, in the company of Apatu, head of the Boni village.
[62]
[361] 1882 Apatu secedes, taking with him about 150 persons and founds the village which bears his name on the lower course of the Maroni.

551 /123 cont. /
553

and supplanting the others, but in numerous cases the names are used concurrently; in general an individual is designated among his maternal relatives by his pikin nɛm, while the people of other villages designate him by his gaɛ nɛm or by a cognomen. It has happened to us many a time in the course of the same conversation to hear the same individual designated by two or three different names.

• 551 It goes without saying that this custom makes any census
125 of the Refugee Blacks impracticable, for as long as one does not
128 know individually the members of a lineage and their genealogy, it is impossible to understand anything.

Nevertheless, one must not see in this a defense reaction with respect to the European administration. The Refugee Blacks find it completely normal to have several names at a time, for they do not have the notion of the identity of a name with a person.

Thus one of our boatmen was Fintiman to his maternal relatives, Gobiyo to his father and part of his friends, Loamba to his paternal grandfather, and Nakiyu to his first wife.

551 Choice of names. Names are highly varied and their choice
553 does not follow any fixed rule; it is in the exclusive domain of fancy.

A large number are constituted of simple onomatopoeia: Tyutyu, Dada, Dodo, Dudu, etc. (which may be applied indiscriminately to man or woman). Dodo's mother explained to us the reason for her choice: dodo was the refrain of an air which often sang in her head while she was pregnant. /124/

551 Again are pointed out:
177

--More or less deformed European names: Afayèl (Rafaèl), Modèl, Pasensi (Patience), Félisi (Félix), Sophie, Toïna (Antonia). Certain names are deformed European proper names; for example: Sota for Chotard (name of an official in Saint-Laurent);

/129 cont. /

429
602 The conditions under which children are brought up throw
a strong light on the thought of the Refugee Blacks relative to
kinship and are worth a special study.

• [125] In the course of an investigation carried on from October
to December, 1957, we were able to record with precision under
what conditions had been raised 311 persons distributed thus:

Male sex	born before 1936 (education finished).	73
	born from 1936 to 1949 inclusive (education in process) (1)	88

1. Study of the case of children
born after 1949 was of no interest
because the definite assignment
of their guardianship was not yet
made at the end of the year 1957.

Female sex	born before 1936 (education finished)	72
	born from 1936 to 1949 inclusive (edu- cation in process)	78
	Total	311